



Screenprint; POSTER; RAY ARNOLD

Ray Arnold's involvement with Chameleon began, coincidentally, with its move into the old Blundstone Building. As the co-operative established workable studio spaces and developed a comprehensive exhibition programme, Ray provided Chameleon with an immediate public face through his regular posters. His poster work, however, extends beyond a catalogue of Chameleon's range of activities, it chronicles much of the exhibition and performing arts initiatives in Hobart and beyond, as well as a variety of programmes by other institutions. In this extensive body of work, Ray is the true chameleon allowing each event to assert its identity while evolving a personal style. Beyond the immediate impact and "look" is the subtle manipulation of very particular imagery, pertinent to each subject. This work contributes much to the tradition of poster art, and the specific print medium of screenprinting. There is a debt to, and yet considerable advance upon, the silkscreen genre of "image scavenging" - which preceded current postmodernist tendencies by twenty years; as well as a continual cross-referencing between these posters and his extensive "private" body of prints and paintings.

Paul Zika
Acting Chairman
University of Tasmania Art Exhibitions Committee

The importance of Chameleon Inc to Hobart is that it extends the dialogue of contemporary art, a dialogue which for this city exists only in the cloisters of the Tasmanian School of Art. Without this dialogue it can be counted on that the death-rate and exodus of artists concerned with ambitious art will totally eliminate the possibility of a local brand of that sort of art.¹

Written in 1983 at the time of the Anzart exhibition in Hobart, Chris Coventry's review of the collective exhibition, which Chameleon mounted to mark the event, addressed directly the difficulties which artists have, struggling to survive and to maintain a viable practice, in a city where there is a dearth of patronage.

Much of the early part of Coventry's article dealt with the problem of identity which faced a collective of artists only just beginning to find the wherewithal to run as a collaborative group. Certainly, the leasing of the Blundstone Building, a former boot factory, was one of the central attainments in 1983, and, of course, this gave the collective the studios and gallery which have become the focus of so much of the visual arts activity in Hobart in recent years. From the very beginning Chameleon members were committed to a small number of workshops as well as the gallery and, early in its development, the establishment of a print workshop with screenprint equipment became a priority.

The impetus for the model which Chameleon established can reasonably be sheeted home to artists like Bo Jones who had come to Hobart to undertake post-graduate studies and who had had some experience with the South Australian developments, which included the Experimental Art Foundation and the artist' co-op, Roundspace. Chris Coventry argued that the issue of artists' collectives became a central point of discussion in the early 1980s, and he went on to say:

Initially, alternative economics arose from the need of artists to share the costs of studio-workshop space and equipment, which was allied to moves to set up gallery spaces to show work that, for political or aesthetic reasons, couldn't or wouldn't go into establishment galleries. When the arts-funding bodies started to give support to these co-ops, that became another reason for artists to band together: for a better chance of winning something in the funding lottery.²

Chameleon is now, of course, part of a network of collective art spaces which are spread across the country, and its exhibitions programme does much to focus attention upon the work produced under the aegis of these art spaces.

When Ray Arnold came to Hobart in 1983 to take up a teaching position in the Tasmanian School of Art, he joined Chameleon and was instrumental in the setting up of the print workshop. An accomplished etcher and screenprinter, Arnold's prodigious output of posters seen here in this exhibition has emanated from this workshop during the past four years. As factual information, this collection of posters charts the notable range and depth of visual arts activity in Tasmania since Anzart; Ray Arnold has been commissioned to produce a large number of the posters for exhibitions which have occurred at Chameleon, the University of Tasmania's Centre for the Arts Gallery and its Fine Arts Gallery, and for the Cockatoo workshops and gallery in Launceston.

TOWER



TATLIN PROMISE

FRAGMENTS

of memory



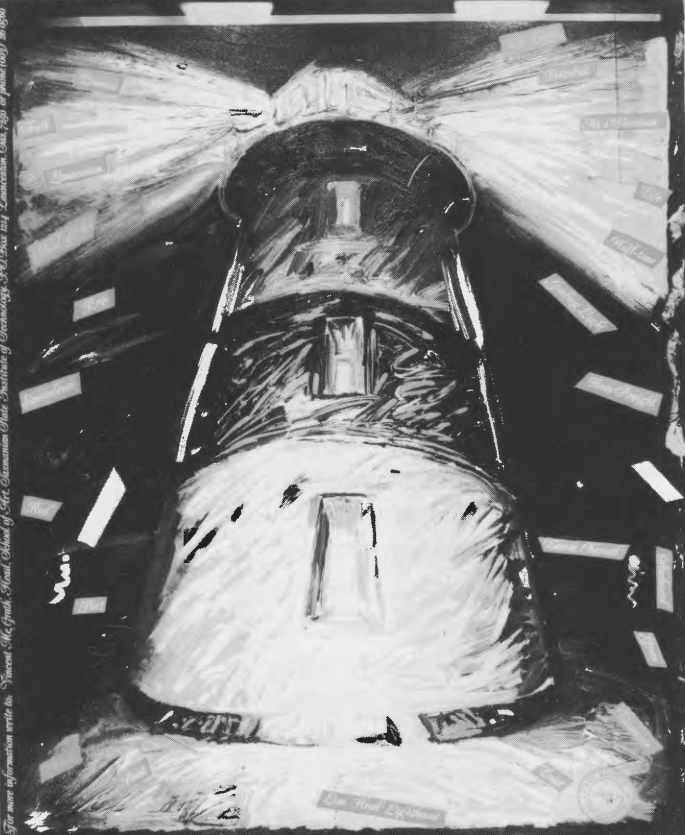
Recent Ceramics by Lorraine Jenyns

FRAGMENTS OF MEMORY: WATERS GALLERY OPENS APRIL 1988 AUGUST 26 CLOSSES 1988 MAY 19 SEPTEMBER 6 1988 12th FLOOR 11 LAST VISIT: 1988 HOURS: TUES-SAT 10-6 PM SUN 12-6 PM

EXHIBITION ASSISTED BY THE TASMANIAN ARTS ADVISORY BOARD

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CHAMELEON



6 Six Painters: Kate Lohse, Mandy Martin, Margaret Morgan, Susan
Norrie, Wendy Storrinos, Ania Walicz: Chameleon 46 Campbell St
Hobart: 3 Oct - 19 Oct: Tues - Sat, 10am - 4pm. Assisted by VAB & TAAB

HEARTLAND

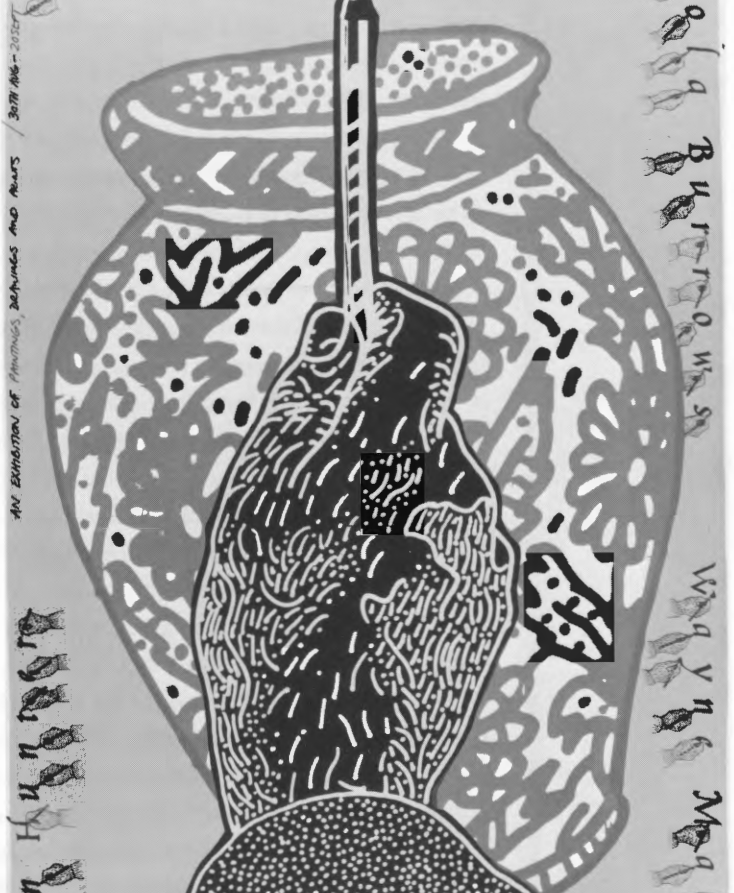


**EASY
PIECES**

EIGHT

CHAMELeon

An exhibition of black and white photographic images by PAT BRASSINGTON titled Eight Easy Pieces opens Saturday June 21 at 5.00p.m. and runs until Saturday July 12 1986 at Chameleon Gallery 46 Campbell St. Hobart. Gallery hours: Tues-Sat 10-6. Chameleon is assisted by the Visual Arts Board of the Australia Council and the Tasmanian Arts Advisory Board.



CHAMELeon

CHAMELEON 46 CAMPBELL ST HOBART TAS 7000 GALLERY HOURS 10-6 TUES-SAT
ASSISTED BY THE VISUAL ARTS BOARD AND THE TASMANIAN ARTS ADVISORY BOARD

Why an exhibition of Ray Arnold's exhibition posters (among others)? After all, this is only a part of his practice, a practice which embodies both etching and painting. But this exhibition does address a problematical aspect of the visual arts which deserves attention. Howard Becker, in an article on the arts and the crafts which has become a classic in its field, has pointed out that "art" and "craft" are two contrasting kinds of aesthetic work organisation, and work ideology, differing in the standards of utility, virtuoso skill, and beauty.³ Now, if one applied this set of definitions to the work which Ray Arnold does, then, in these terms, his poster production might be said to operate within the field of craft. In Becker's terms, the practical needs of someone else are invariably thought to be at the forefront; crafts usually demand considerable skill (a necessary condition of screenprinting); and the notion of beauty (or should we say a commitment to exploration and innovation in the domain of aesthetics?) is, to a certain extent tempered by the demands of commission.

But this aspect of the continuing debate about what art and craft are has reached a kind of logjam; indeed, Rob Horne has pointed out recently that the only real function to be gained by examining the art-craft/utility-non-utility question is that it helps to situate various practitioners within desired areas of production⁴; certainly this is the project which Becker seeks to analyse.

However, as Horne argues, there is another extremely important reason for engaging in this debate. Although it doesn't form part of his argument, it seems important to emphasise that "utility/non-utility" are often read as being synonymous with "function/non-function", and this goes a long way towards obscuring the more significant problem, which Horne outlines when he says:

The important thing - the 'real function', if you like - of a chair, of any chair, is not that it is in some metaphysical sense 'always a chair' but that someone sat on it. I stress not 'sat' but *someone*. The questions that need to be asked before any 'function' can be established are - *who* sat on it? *When* did they sit on it? *Why* did they sit on it?⁵

This is a salutary observation: whether Becker likes it or not, his argument turns upon what the object is *in itself* (art or craft, utilitarian or non-utilitarian, skilful or not skilful), and the object can then be used to define what the maker is - artist or craftsman/woman, skilful or inept, socially committed or hedonist, and before we know where we are, we are back to analysis which directs its attention to the idea that the art object is an extension of the maker.

Now, this is most emphatically *not* the intention of this exhibition and indeed these posters seem to confound that project in a particularly resonant way. It may be true that getting a sense of what Ray Arnold sees as being the structuring elements which determine his practice will give us some idea of the way in which it might be read "out there", but this won't necessarily mean that we gain an understanding of how it is being used or whose interests it is serving. But if visual arts practice is having any effect at all, then these are issues which should be addressed.

All of the posters in the exhibition serve to proclaim events which occur after the posters have been completed: a condition of their production is that Arnold knows (roughly) what it is that he has to advertise (an exhibition, a lecture programme, a theatre production). The constraints that are brought to bear upon his practice are meaningful in a real sense in this exhibition: value will inhere to the individual works to a greater or lesser extent as a result of their ability to signify something which is already inscribed (an exhibition, say). Pleasure is derived from seeing an appropriate "fit" between the event and its representation, and/or of the fulfilment of a connotatively rich promise (or implied meaning).

Take the example of the *Heartlands* poster, for instance, a poster for a travelling exhibition developed by Frank McBride for Wollongong Art Gallery in 1985. Ray Arnold has said in conversation that he had intended to produce an image which would suggest, in some way, the project that the painter Sue Norrie was engaged upon at the time (Norrie, who was one of the six artists - all painters, all women - in the show, was one of the instigators of the exhibition); the eventual image, a fragment of the luxurious fabric of the dress in Ingres's portrait *Madame Moitessier Seated* (1856) offered and continues to offer a number of pertinent readings. Julie Ewington made the observation in the catalogue of *Heartlands* that:

... Feminism of the 1970s has profoundly affected every one of these artists. For the most part this influence has been felt obliquely, and particularly in questions of art, such as issues about representation and forms of artistic practice. None are currently active in feminist campaigns or activities and most have never been. I'm not trying to establish "authentic" feminist credentials, but to point out the broad influence that feminism has had was, after all, one of the original objectives of the political work of the last decade.⁶

The argument expressed here has not been lost on Ray Arnold who has sought, in the *Heartland* poster, to find ways of speaking about the issue. There is clearly a sense in the poster that the exhibition is *about* painting (the image is recognisably *from* the Ingres); the incorporation of a fragment of the whole work conveys the idea that the exhibition provides a critique of traditional forms of representation (Julie Ewington's own article "Fragmentation and Feminism," in *Art and Text* (Spring 1982) has done much to inform that debate); furthermore, the luxuriousness of the fabric playfully invokes the subject matter with which Sue Norrie was dealing at the time.

Already here we are past a simple level of denotation - this is not just description but the beginnings of a highly complex order of signification. In the absence of the exhibition, the poster will, to a greater or lesser extent, *stand for* that which it represents and, for those who experienced the event itself, the poster will function as a mnemonic device. Furthermore, side by side with other posters in the exhibition, we do not see a "reflection" of the artist; rather the works provide further, denser levels of signification. Consider, for instance, the way the term *Chameleon* begins to function, as a picture of its activities is slowly built up - a proper name begins to fill with meaning as information regarding its institutional practices is proclaimed.

Consider, also, the way the name *Visual Arts Board* functions here: the invoking of its name at once *describes* the extent of its power, at the same time as it *implies* that that power is woven into the very fabric of the thing it ostensibly supports; this is not intended to suggest that that power is corrupted, but merely to make the point that the conditions of visual arts production and reception are not generated through acts of self-determination but are the result of highly complex structures within which the visual artist operates.

Now, this is not to suggest that the visual artist is *powerless*: in the case of Ray Arnold, the point is worth making that he chooses the commissions he wishes to undertake. What's more his practice and the imagery he produces are an affirmation that the visual arts have something to say in the domain of ideas. This is often done with a considerable degree of subtlety: I am reminded for instance, of the number of occasions upon which he refers to the constructivism of the Russian avant-garde artists (Tatlin, especially), the central preoccupation of which was the search for a methodology which could be activated in support of the greater good of the people. His use of montage and the implications of appropriation are clearly informed by his reading - Heartfield's mobilisation of montage in a savage denunciation of Fascism is a case in point - *Four Ships* is one poster in the show which seeks to engage the issue of the abuses to which the oceans are currently being subjected.

What is worth remembering about this exhibition is that invariably there has been a very careful selection and construction of the imagery and that the posters draw attention to ways of looking at the issues and problems *and* pleasures in the events they seek to represent. The exhibition offers this level of engagement, but, much more, it offers a fascinating panoply of fragments from a recent period of our cultural practice, a period which we shouldn't allow to be lost.

Jonathan Holmes
Hobart,
July 1987

1 Coventry, Chris, "Boots and All: The Chameleon Collective," in *Anzart, Hobart, 1983: A Survey*, a supplement to *Island Magazine*, 16, Spring 1983, p.38.

2 *ibid.*

3 Becker, Howard, "Arts and Crafts," in his *Artworld*, Berkeley, UCLA Pr., 1982, pp.272-24.

4 Home, Rob., "Functions: 'I'll teach you differences,'" in *Sylogisms: Drawing upon Fantasy and Function* (exhibition catalogue), Hobart, University of Tasmania, Centre for the Arts, 1987, n.p.

5 *ibid.*

6 Ewington, Julie, *Heartlands* (exhibition catalogue), Wollongong, Wollongong Art Gallery, 1985, n.p.

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